

University alliance focuses on future

By University Relations



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The Inland Northwest Research Alliance has announced the selection of a new president, Kermit Hall of Utah State University, and a new executive director, Steven Billingsley, former INRA chief of staff.

A consortium of eight research universities in the northwestern United States, INRA has brought \$27 million in to the Inland Northwest region in the form of innovative research and educational programs.

INRA, which held a board of directors meeting in Idaho Falls July 22, is a partner with Bechtel and BWXT in the management and operations contract for the INEEL, operated for the U.S. Department of Energy. INRA's roles include the support of collaborative basic and applied research programs between its member universities and the INEEL staff by funding several diverse multi-year research projects in the critical mission areas of the laboratory, including environmental management, energy sciences and national security.

INRA is the only organization of its kind in the country. A nonprofit, scientific and educational organization, INRA fosters collaborative research programs to educate America's future scientists and engineers. The research and development budget for the member universities in 2001 is the equivalent of the seventh largest institution of higher education in the United States, in terms of research funding.

"The solidarity of the eight universities in five states brings unique advantages and strengths to these universities," Hall said. "The Department of Energy believes that INRA has accomplished so much in its management role at the Idaho National Engineering and Environmental Laboratory. I look forward to working with our other Board members [the INRA universities' presidents] to broaden INRA's mission and continue its many successes."

INRA was formed to promote research in the area of science and engineering, with a focus on studies that will result in practical applications, such as water treatment, soil remediation, and infectious disease research.

The alliance provides the organizational structure for rapid development of collaborative research and educational programs in technical disciplines for its member institutions. This is accomplished through partnerships with government

agencies, national laboratories and businesses. The research is focused in critical areas such as environmental sciences, national security and energy.

“I wholeheartedly recommend participation in INRA to anyone interested in collaborative research with a strongly interdisciplinary context,” said Northern Arizona University’s Maribeth Watwood, a former professor and researcher at Idaho State University. “The value to students involved in INRA-funded projects cannot be overstated. Their exposure, not only to high quality science, but also to other aspects of the national laboratory environment, will assist them tremendously in navigating their careers.”

Gautam Pillay, INRA executive director since 2001, resigned effective Aug. 1 to take a university leadership position in South Dakota. Billingsley started his new duties as executive director on Aug. 1.

“Dr. Gautam Pillay has provided extraordinary leadership in developing the coalition of INRA universities,” Hall said. “The scientific and educational successes of INRA are due in large measure to Pillay’s planning and leadership skills. He will be missed.”

“We are fortunate indeed to have a person of Steve Billingsley’s talents to take the place of Dr. Pillay,” Hall said.

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